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XXXVIII.—*Letters, Announcements, &c.*

The following letters, addressed “To the Editor of ‘The Ibis,’” have been received:—

Marldon, near Totnes.
20th March 1873.

SIR,—In ‘The Ibis’ for 1862, p. 207, I recorded the dates at which a female of *Vultur auricularis* in my possession had laid an egg during four successive years ending 26th February 1862; and I think it may now be interesting to record the dates of the eggs which the same individual has subsequently produced, viz.:—

24th February 1863,	2nd March 1868,
21st ,, 1864,	3rd ,, 1869,
20th ,, 1865,	18th ,, 1872,
24th ,, 1866,	17th ,, 1873.

This bird has never laid more than one egg in the same year; her eggs are white, but sometimes, especially in the case of the earlier eggs, more or less sprinkled and clouded with rufous, chiefly towards the obtuse end.

I am yours, &c.

J. H. GURNEY.

SIR,—Mr. Blanford has recently directed my attention to a supposed new species of Plover from Burmah, described by Mr. Hume in his new periodical, ‘Stray Feathers’ (No. 1, November 1862, p. 17), under the name of *Eudromias tenuirostris*. I imagine that it was by a *lapsus calami* that Mr. Hume wrote *Eudromias* for *Ægialitis*; for his description shows that the bird belongs to the latter genus, and in one paragraph he speaks of it as not belonging “to any of the

species of *Ægialitis* above enumerated.” As he has given a full description and measurements, there is no difficulty in identifying it; and I have no hesitation therefore in saying that it is the *Ægialitis hartingi* of Swinhoe, figured and described in the ‘Proceedings’ of the Zoological Society for 1870, p. 136, pl. xii. One of the peculiarities of this species is that the shafts of all the primaries are of a uniform hair-brown colour, which distinguishes it at once from others of the genus; the rectrices also are barred in a remarkable manner; and both these characters are pointed out by Mr. Hume. In other respects, as regards colour, it comes very close to *Æ. hiaticula*, but is a larger bird, with the bill nearly twice as long, much longer tarsi and toes, and a slight web between the middle and outer toes, as in *Æ. semipalmata* of the New World.

I should not be surprised to learn that this is also the *Charadrius longipes** of Père David (Nouv. Archiv. 1867, Bulletin, p. 38), obtained at Peking, and described as “close to *C. hiaticula*, but with longer legs.”

Mr. Swinhoe, I observe, has referred Père David’s bird, with hesitation, to *C. hiaticula* (P.Z.S. 1871, p. 404); but as he mentions no other instance of the occurrence of our European bird in China, I should doubt if it is found there, especially as it is unknown in India and the Malay peninsula.

I am aware that Heuglin, in his ‘Ornithologie Nordost-Afrikas,’ p. 1027, cites amongst the localities for *C. hiaticula* “the Himalayas,” and, “during the migration, western and southern Asia;” but he does not say upon what authority this statement is made. Jerdon does not notice the species in his ‘Birds of India;’ neither does Mr. Holdsworth include it in his recently published “Catalogue of the Birds of Ceylon” (P. Z. S. 1872, pp. 404–183). I can only suppose that, as regards the Himalayas, Heuglin may have relied upon an observation by Mr. Blyth, who in a commentary upon Jerdon’s ‘Birds of India,’ published in ‘The Ibis’ for 1867, adds to Dr. Jerdon’s list thus (p. 165):—“ÆGIALITES HIA-

* Nec *C. longipes*, Temm. & Schleg., qui *fulvus*, Gmelin; nec *C. longipes*, Heuglin, qui *C. pecuarius*, Temm.

TICULA (L.), *Charadrius placidus*, G. R. Gray, B. M. Cat. Hodgson's Coll. 2nd ed. p. 70.

"Two examples of what I consider to be the common British Ringed Plover are among the skins sent by Mr. Hodgson to the British Museum."

Now the two examples above referred to, which Mr. Blyth thought were *C. hiaticula*, and which Mr. Gray had named *placidus**, are undoubtedly *Æ. hartingi*, Swinhoe, *Æ. tenuirostris*, Hume, the very bird now under consideration! Of this I have satisfied myself by a recent examination of the specimens in the British Museum. How Mr. Blyth could have overlooked the very marked specific characters of this bird, I know not; but possibly there was no specimen of *Ch. hiaticula* close at hand for comparison.

Mr. Gray thus described the species:—

"CHARADRIUS PLACIDUS.

"Greyish fuscous; quills fuscous black; front throat, collar round the neck, beneath the body, and margins of wing-coverts white; tail greyish fuscous, the outer feathers marked near the tips with black, and tipped with white; the outer web of outer feather also white; lore and band across the breast a mixture of black and greyish fuscous. Bill black; feet pale.

"Length 8" 9"', wings 5" 8"', tarsi 1" 3"', bill from gape 10"."

There is a coloured drawing of this bird, of the natural size, in Mr. Hodgson's collection of drawings in the British Museum; and on the same plate is a sketch in pencil of the wing, tibia, tarsus, and foot, and the stomach, with the name "*can-tiana?*" written by Mr. Hodgson also in pencil.

It follows, then, that for this well-marked species Mr. Gray's is the oldest name, and must have priority, while Mr. Swinhoe's (I am sorry to say) will sink into a synonym. This must also be the fate of Mr. Hume's *tenuirostris*, it having been bestowed two years after Mr. Swinhoe's *hartingi*.

Should Père David's bird prove, as I suspect, to belong to the same species, his name for it (*longipes*), bestowed in 1867, must also give way. Not only is his description insufficient

* Cat. Hodgson's Coll. 2nd ed. p. 70 (1863); cf. also 'Handlist,' iii. p. 15, No. 10001 (1871).

to enable one to identify the species, but the name proposed by him had already been bestowed by Temminck & Schlegel (Faun. Japon. p. 104, t. 62, 1842) upon another species of the genus in which Père David has placed it. *Ægialitis longipes*, of von Heuglin (Syst. Uebers. Vög. N. O. Afr. 1856), is, as stated above, Temminck's *Charadrius pecuarius*.

Mr. Swinhoe, it will be remembered, obtained his specimens of *Æ. hartingi* (with one of which he has most kindly presented me) from the flats of the Upper Yangtze, Szechuen, in spring*; and he has quite recently recorded it (Ibis, 1873, p. 96) from Nanking, where he was informed that it is common in winter. We may now add to the habitat Pekin (David)? doubtless therefore the whole of China, Burmah (Jerdon, Hume), and Nepal (Hodgson).

The species thus appears to have an extensive range; and now that attention has been directed to it, we may expect to hear of the acquisition of many more specimens.

Yours &c.

J. E. HARTING.

[This letter was received in time for publication in the last number of 'The Ibis,' but accidentally omitted.—ED.]

British Museum,
February 12th, 1873.

SIR,—There is something still to be done before we shall thoroughly understand the vexed question of the two species of *Hieracidea* in New Zealand. Dr. Buller deserves all praise for his conscientious attempt to elucidate the matter; but that he has not succeeded in dispelling the surrounding difficulties is shown by Captain Hutton's letter in the last 'Ibis.' After examining our series in this museum I rather share Captain Hutton's dilemma as to the distinctive characters of *Hieracidea australis*. (N.B. The small bird, if ultimately proved to be distinct, must bear this title, the name of *Falco brunneus*, of Gould, being already preoccupied by Bechstein, who thus called the common Kestrel of Europe.)

* Cf. P. Z. S. 1870, p. 136, and 1871, p. 404.

The New-Zealand *Hieracideæ* are rather abnormal members of the Falconine series; for it is rare to find a bird which, when young, is uniform above, and becomes barred when it is old; nor do they here closely coincide with their Australian congeners, excepting as regards their uniformly cloudy breasts when young. The sexes of the Australian *Hieracideæ* do not appear to differ very markedly in size, an inch in the length of the female's wing being in the Australian species of the genus as much as the male yields to his more powerful consort; therefore the fact recorded by Dr. Buller that the female of *H. brunnea* exceeds the male by 2 inches in length of wing (and that too in the smallest species of the genus) is surprising, and will require ratification. Thus the analogy of the Australian species, to say nothing of the matured opinions of Dr. Buller and Mr. Gurney (and, I gather from his letter, of Captain Hutton also), would almost preclude us from believing that a bird measuring 13·5 inches in length, with a wing of 9·45, can be the mate of a female measuring 17·5 inches in length, with a wing of 11·5, were it not for the gradual gradation shown below. The difference would appear too great; but then what shall be said of the species after comparing the following table of measurements, drawn from the published writings of Dr. Buller, Mr. Gurney, and Captain Hutton, and added to those of fifteen specimens in the national collection (nearly all of the latter, being I regret to say, without record of sex)? Still they ought to have been approximately determinable if Dr. Buller's proportions of the birds hold good; and this is apparently the gist of Captain Hutton's measurements, on which he makes "no comment." This, however, I feel bound to do, as it is the duty of the cabinet naturalist to weigh well the labours of practised observers in the field, while the latter should receive with equal respect the results placed before them by the workers at home, who are often in a position, from the examination of large series in the museums and private collections, to arrive at very sound conclusions concerning the relations of birds. I thus venture to give the measurements of the wing in our national series, adding those of the authors above mentioned.

	Wing. inches.
1. Buller, "♂ <i>H. brunnea</i> "	9.0
2. Gurney, no. 6, "♀ [?] immature"	9.25
3. Mus. Brit. no. 6	9.35
4. Mus. Brit. no. 8	9.45
5. Mus. Brit. no. 9	9.5
6. Hutton, no. 7	9.6
7. Mus. Brit. no. 7	9.7
8. Hutton, no. 8	9.8
9. Mus. Brit. no. 5 [♂]	9.9
10. Mus. Brit. nos. 1, 4 { [♂]	10.0
11. Hutton, nos. 5, 6 { [♂]	10.3
12. Mus. Brit. no. 2	10.5
13. Mus. Brit. no. 3	10.5
14. Hutton, no. 1 [♀]	10.95
15. Buller, "♀ <i>H. brunnea</i> "	11.0
16. Hutton, no. 4 [♀]	11.2
17. Buller, "♂ <i>H. novæ zealandiæ</i> "	11.25
18. Mus. Brit. no. 10	11.35
19. Mus. Brit. no. 12	11.4
20. Buller, "♀ <i>H. novæ zealandiæ</i> "	11.5
21-24. Mus. Brit. nos. 11, 13, 14, 15	11.5
25. Hutton, no. 2 { [♀]	11.75
26. Gurney, no. 3 { [♀]	11.75
27. Hutton, no. 3 [♀]	11.8

Thus we have the measurement of the wing in twenty-seven specimens. Those in the museum are numbered as above indicated, in case of future verification; I have not recorded the exact locality of the specimens, which are from both the north and south islands of New Zealand and from the Auckland Islands, as my object in this communication is to show the gradual gradation from one bird to the other as regards the length of wing. Leaving out of the calculation Nos. 7 and 8 of Captain Hutton's last list (*Ibis*, 1873, p. 101), concerning which Dr. Buller can doubtless give us a satisfactory explanation, and taking into account only those which offer evidence of having been carefully sexed, the question for determination seems to be, whether, if there *are* two species, a large female of *H. brunnea* may overlap a small male of *H. novæ zealandiæ*, and, therefore, what is the maximum length of wing attained by the sexes of these birds? For in-

stance, if Dr. Buller is correct in his estimate of the sexes of each species, No. 16 is a large ♀ of *H. brunnea*, and the ♂ of this species must vary so much that its wing ranges between 9 and 10 inches in length, and thus Dr. Buller got hold of an exceptionally small bird, which accounts for the great disparity in the sexes of the smaller Falcon.

I am, &c.,

R. BOWDLER SHARPE.

3rd June, 1873.

SIR,—In the last number of 'The Ibis,' Mr. Blanford, in his article in 'Stray Feathers,' makes some remarks upon *Argus ocellatus*, and helps to continue a very erroneous impression regarding that species. When Mr. Wood stated in the 'Annals and Mag. Nat. Hist.' last year, that some of the feathers in my plate of this species were the same as the rectrices of *Pavo muticus*, I did not make any reply, because I thought that when one had studied a family of birds sufficiently long to attempt to write a monograph of the group, it might at least be supposed he would not be unable to discriminate the tail-feathers of one species from those of another, especially such conspicuous ones as belong to our Argus Pheasant and the Javan Peacock! But it seems I was mistaken; and therefore, when a conscientious naturalist like Mr. Blanford gives credence to such a statement without having, so far as I am aware, ever investigated the subject himself, it seems time that I should say something in the matter. Both before the publication of my plate and also since, I have carefully compared the feathers in question, preserved in the museum here, with the rectrices of *P. muticus*; and neither in form, structure, nor colour do they resemble each other in any degree. At no age does *P. muticus* possess rectrices like those figured in my work; and I was greatly surprised that any one should have thought of confounding them. As to these feathers and the single one of *P. bipunctatus* belonging to birds of another genus, it is hardly necessary to add that I do not concur in that view.

In regard to Mr. Blanford's remarks about the inadvisability

of describing species from fragments, there is doubtless much truth in what he says; but he might with equal reason go a little farther, and object to an ornithologist describing a bird before all the phases of plumage assumed in its life are known to him. I need only cite the family of Hawks, to prove that more errors have been committed by describing as distinct the same species in different stages of plumage (each of which was only, so to speak, a fragment of the entire subject), than is ever likely to result from descriptions founded solely upon heads or tails.

Great benefits have been bestowed already upon natural science by the discoveries made from fragmentary remains, and they far outweigh the comparatively few errors committed from the same cause; and until we arrive at that blissful period when mistakes shall be no more, it would be a great pity to neglect even piecemeal evidence in the study of a subject.

Every naturalist knows how easy it is to commit mistakes; happy is the man whose quiver holds the fewest of them.

Yours &c.,

D. G. ELLIOT.

SIR,—In my letter of June 1872 (*Ibis*, 1872, p. 336) I noticed the singular dearth of birds in that region of the ocean traversed by me. I have again passed over much the same route, sailing from Pará on the 17th of March, and touching at Madeira *en route* for Lisbon and England. The line we described had a considerable northern curve, as our visit to Madeira was only determined on when we found ourselves short of provisions.

We did not see a single bird after leaving the mouths of the Amazon till we came within a hundred miles of Madeira; then a solitary Petrel turned up, also we were visited by a cock Greenfinch, a Sky-Lark, a Redpole Linnet, and two young Red-headed Shrikes. I never saw so deserted a region! And the captain of our ship and another of the other line of steamers plying between Lisbon and Pará, who happened to be on board, both assured me they never saw birds on their

transit. This may certainly be called the birdless region of the ocean.

I take this opportunity of saying a word with reference to Mr. W. T. Blanford's remark (*Ibis*, 1873, p. 218) that I "must be added to the number of those who have described this bird (*Elanus melanopterus*) as laying white eggs." I received the egg described (*Ibis*, 1868, p. 242) from my friend Mr. William Atmore, and I have no doubt he correctly identified it; but, from the experience I subsequently acquired, I believe that white is *not* the normal colour of the eggs of this bird. Mr. Kotze, my son, and myself took many specimens on the Berg river in 1869; all were coloured, some more, some less.

My impression is that the amount of colour depends on the strength of the bird, and that the white egg sent to Atmore was laid by a sickly bird. My son took a nest of *Circus maurus* within sight of our windows; the eggs were nicely coloured. A few days afterwards, seeing the birds still about the nest, he again visited and found another clutch of eggs, but much lighter in colour; a third time he robbed the nest, and the eggs were pure white. I think this shows exhaustion on the part of the bird, each successive laying being whiter than the preceding.

I am, Sir, yours &c.,

E. L. LAYARD.

SIR.—It may interest the readers of 'The Ibis' to know that during the present winter the Firth of Forth has been visited by an extraordinary flock of Sea-Gulls of various species and evidently of arctic parentage. Between the towns of Kincardine and Alloa the estuary has been frequented by swarms of Kittiwakes, the surface of the water being at times literally covered with birds. While on wing the multitude was so great as to appear, when seen against the opposite woods of Dunmore, like a heavy fall of snow. These Kittiwakes were principally in immature plumage, not more than 4 per cent. of adult birds being observable. On the 27th December last, accompanied by one or two friends, I visited

the estuary, and found on that occasion between 150 and 200 Glaucous Gulls flying about in the immediate vicinity of Kincardine, besides a number of Iceland Gulls, the two species being easily recognized as they flew past. The first-named bird has a soft Owl-like flight, which is very different from that of the Great Black-backed Gull; while the Iceland Gull is distinguished by its quick flapping motion, resembling the flight of some of the larger Terns. After examining upwards of twenty Glaucous Gulls, shot in the Firth between the date I have given and the 4th of January, I find the following results:—I. Size extremely variable, the total length ranging from $25\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 30 inches, and the breadth from 58 to 64 inches. II. The birds were chiefly in the plumage of the first year, the proportion of adult birds being even less than in the case of the Kittiwake. The same variation occurs in the measurements of the Iceland Gull, so far as I can judge from an examination of four or five specimens which have been shot by my friend Mr. Harvie Brown.

This unprecedented influx of Sea-Gulls is evidently due to the presence of shoals of sprats or garvies (*Clupea sprattus*), which at full tide swarm near the surface. The fish are taken in very large quantities in the firth, and disposed of in cartloads to the farmers in the neighbourhood, who use them as manure. No doubt, I think, need be entertained as to the origin of the invading Gulls. They can scarcely be regarded as offshoots from British nurseries; indeed the presence of so many Glaucous and Iceland Gulls clearly shows that they are migrants from arctic waters.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.,

ROBERT GRAY.

Glasgow, January 9, 1873.

The following extracts are from a letter received from our Editor, dated "Off St. Domingo, May 3rd."

"We have had a first-rate passage, so far as regards weather, but one very destitute of ornithological interest. Starting as we did, in the middle of April, I certainly thought we should come across a good many migratory birds in the Channel and

some days beyond it, and that I should find some materials out of which to concoct an ornithological letter. All the birds I saw, however, were a Yellow Wagtail (♂), which stayed with us all one day. It came on board when we were about 400 or 500 miles from land; and we carried it another 150 miles from home. Another bird was a Swallow, which turned up 250 miles or so from the Azores, and staid about all one day; next morning we were off Terceira, and it was gone. On the 26th of April I saw several ash-coloured long-winged Shearwaters and some Petrels (black with white rump); but they were too far off to make them out. This was about 1200 miles from Barbadoes. On the 27th, 900 miles from Barbadoes, I saw more Petrels, and a beetle flew round the stern of the ship for some time, but I could not catch it. On the 28th there were more Petrels about.

“ We reached Barbadoes on the 30th; and we went on shore for an hour or two, and took a drive of a few miles along the eastern shore of the island. I saw more birds than I expected, but, my guns being packed away, I did not get any skins. There were two species of Humming-birds, one doubtless *Orthorhynchus cristatus*, the other a *Eulampis* (I think, *E. holosericeus*, not *E. jugularis*). I also saw a *Certhiola*. It had no white on the wing, and no yellow on the rump, so far as I could make out*. *Myiodiocytes pusillus* was there, and a *Dendræca*, I think *D. æstiva*. A small *Quiscalus*, with white eyes, hopped about the road, and a little Finch I took to be *Loxigilla noctis*. I could have spent a few days very profitably even in Barbadoes; but we had to be on board at 4 o'clock, and started for St. Thomas's the same evening. I expect to have a day in Jamaica the day after to-morrow, to reach Colon about the 7th or 8th, and to leave Panama on the 10th.

* [I have lately obtained a specimen of the *Certhiola* of Barbadoes, which is *C. martinicana*. The *Quiscalus*, which I have likewise received, is *Q. fortirostris*, Lawr. Pr. Ac. Sc. Phil. 1868, p. 360.—P. L. S.]